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Do You Know Where Your Children Are?

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**DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR CHILDREN
ARE?**

It was a Wednesday night in Manhattan and the two men Vince and David were finished playing chess had taken the vodka Absolut of course nothing but the best for these two limes and shot glasses a little of the hard stuff never killed anyone did it to the roof of Vince's place on 28th and 3rd were listening to the sirens and honks experiencing the voyeurism of watching a total stranger below someone you'll never meet it doesn't matter anyway you couldn't save them if you tried watching them scurry through the crosswalks somehow fascinating for no reason really other than the distance the oddness of it if you had a gun you could shoot them easily surprised it doesn't happen more often the air rife with the chill of early December the roof tar smell the magnificent city cleaner and nobler and wiser from this height sometimes you rise above it all sometimes you don't

but it being a Wednesday anyway Woden's Day Vince pointed out Woden like Odin the Norse god, head cheese, Mr. Big and out of the blue like David says

Judy Hashamoto missed

Judy Hashamoto? Holy lawsuits, Batman. You mean Judy Hashamoto as in Mr. Hepburn's-not-here-right-now-can-I-take-a-message?

David nodded.

And the offspring is of your loins?

He made a face.

Oh ho ho ho ho. Merry early Xmas, Mr.
Hepburn

It's isn't funny. She wants to have it
so Vince said
Now is that Wednesday's child is full of woe or is
it Wednesday's child has far to go?
She said it's the size of a thumbnail
Did you suggest this earthling might be better off
in a heavenly sphere?
Jesus, Vince
Pardon me, Reverend
I mean, I want to do the right thing here. I'm not
an asshole

Vince poured them both shots of vodka and made
David raise his to his lips in unison and called
Down the hatch
with the heat of it still in their throats Vince
clasped David roughly by the shoulder and said
Buddy, you wouldn't know the right thing to do if
it came up and bit you
Thanks for the vote of confidence, *Vince*
Much obliged
there was a pause as both licked their own
wounds considered their own plights both were
semigood friends both worked at NBC Vince a
publicist David a market research consultant had started
out in advertising tried to sell their souls to the devil
but it's not as easy as they say sure you make a lot of
money but then you spend it all on the dinner menu
cocaine grams Bermuda towels chablis glasses dry
cleaning bills Barney's suits a decent apartment costs an
arm and a leg and you end up an indentured servant
bowing to Mastercard and wondering Where did I go
wrong?
both were midforties divorced both wearing faded
jeans black leather jackets expensive wristwatches eyes

bloodshot they shouldn't be up this late they both knew that but both were lifelong insomniacs so what can you do?

and sometime later the Judy Hashamoto thing hashed and rehashed three more shots of Absolut down the hatch both were getting rather droopy were getting rather sluggish it being four a.m. when Vince asked

What would you do to stay alive? I mean how much do you value this time we have, this fucking life, this world?

and David answered

A lot

well a lot, how fucking profound. Let me be specific. If you had to, would you kill someone to save your life? Would you eat someone?

Eat someone? You know you are one sick fucker

It happens you know

Not that often

Well what about that movie *Alive* you know those guys on the Uruguayan soccer team whose plane crashed in the Andes they had to resort to cannibalism

Why do they always say 'resort to cannibalism'?

It's no fucking resort I'd ever want to visit

Club Dead

Club Eat Your Dead

No, I mean, it's something to think about. I mean, it's not just that soccer team either. Would you?

Sure I guess I would if I had to but I don't plan to I mean it's pretty fucking rare isn't it?

Maybe maybe not

I'll cross that bridge when I come to it

Yeah but sometimes you're just walking along and all the sudden you're on a bridge and you didn't plan on it it's just there and it's like do I fucking cross this thing or not sometimes it happens in a split second or at most

just a minute or two and you've got to think fast you
better have thought about this before or you'll be fucked
big time

I somehow doubt I'll have to decide whether to
eat someone or not in a split second

true but

but what?

sometimes in life you face a test sometimes you
know when they're coming like a final exam you can
stay up all night on black mollies cramming for it but
sometimes you face a test that isn't scheduled then it's
like those school nightmares like all of a sudden you're
in class naked or something or you show up to class and
everyone is set to take the final exam everyone but you
they've all been studying the fucking French Revolution
for two weeks Robespierre The Reign of Terror the
guillotines invitation to a beheading that kind of thing
except you and you sit there staring at the pages
panicking wondering what the fuck?

well I'm not sure what you mean maybe if you
had some specific instance

you gotta promise never to tell anyone about this
okay I promise

I'm not fucking joking here David, I mean this,
okay? Either you promise seriously to carry this story
with you to your grave or let's just end it here, I'll save
my breath

Okay I promise. What'd you do, eat somebody?
Just forget it

No, I'm sorry. Go on and tell your story

I said forget it

You can't tease me like that. Go on. I'm listening

Okay but you ever breath a word of this to anyone
and I'll fucking hunt you down and kill you

Okay Brando

I'll do this for you, I'll give you this example. And I regret nothing. I'd do it again if I had to.

BLOOD DRIVE

This was eight years ago when my wife was sick she needed a transplant is what it was *harvest* they called it yeah right harvest like the wheat is ripe is golden get out the john deere the heartland of America and all that jazz but heartland is the term alright harvest in the heartland that was eight years ago and we were waiting for a harvest euphemistically speaking but what they were really talking about was a heart in that heartland as in aorta as in ventricles as in Michelle's ticker was on the blink and the woman I loved I would live and die for and had told her so many times lying in bed inside her even You are the one for me I told her You are the one I'd do anything for you I'd die for you and in my jealous papa bear moments I told her If anyone touches you I'll break their arms you say that shit you know don't you? well most of the time you just say it it's just words but this time I meant it

Michelle was the one for me she was electric she had a fineness about her there was nothing I wouldn't do for her whenever she mentioned an old boyfriend I wanted to kill him hunt the fucker down and bash his head with a pipe I felt that strongly about her she was the world she was my reason to live

and so it was April and planting time not harvest time but that was what we needed a harvest we were running out of time that is the doctors said it was aortal fibrillation a congenital heart disease thing hers was about to peter out not like that battery rabbit that just keeps going going going no hers was about to stop she knew that I knew that we all knew that and we needed

a donor fast

I remember thinking before I heard about Michelle that this organ transplant thing was a bit much like Isn't that carrying this recycling idea a bit far? but once it was someone I cared about worshipped adored might be the better word I warmed up to the plan and

got an idea during the blood drive that's right blood drive when we were all filing down to the Bloodmobile a little Winnebago thing blood donation center on wheels where they hook you up to a plastic bag suck out a pint give you orange juice and cookies and send you home with a t-shirt what they'll do to get some blood you never know

and on this particular blood drive I was trying to get everyone to join I was like fucking Jerry Lewis on a muscular dystrophy telethon because Michelle was in a bad way and was always needing transfusions and if any heart came in if we were lucky with the harvest she'd need a lot of blood then and oh yeah I need to mention that she was first on the list of heart recipients in her region in her area finally she'd been moving up on the list for two years it was all a matter of organ donor compatibility and blood type and everything so there it was the big blood drive and I had my daughter Lisa from my first marriage with me and she hated the idea of giving blood It's disgusting she said Gag me with a spoon the selfish little bitch I know I'm not supposed to say that but it's the truth so sue me okay and I had to talk fucking bribe her for her blood even though she said

Why don't we just donate to PBS or something?
but I said

No we need to give blood Michelle might need it
so let's do the right thing

You know I'm not that crazy about Michelle and I
hate needles

Is that all you ever think of? Yourself? For
Chrissakes don't be so petty

I am not being petty it's just that I hate those ugly
old fat nurses poking things in my arm I think they
hurt me on purpose because they're jealous I can't help
it if they're so old and grody

Vince pauses in his story to down another shot
then he says

I never told you about Lisa did I?

I didn't even know you had a daughter

Well there's a reason for that namely it being the
fact that she was one royal grade A bitch

Vince. Whoa. Don't go pulling any punches now

Exactly. She was one dyed-in-the-wool bitch.

Her mother, Ginger, made sure of that. She was spoiled
and self-centered and beautiful and sexy and trouble
from the word go

So did she give the blood?

I mean, you know there's this myth about how
mothers and fathers are supposed to feel about their
kids, about unconditional love, you know, I'll love you
no matter what, and it's all a bunch of bullshit, really,
because love is always conditional, how you feel about
someone or something is always tied to what they say or
do or how they act in a given situation like when I
bought this bracelet for Lisa's 14th birthday and she
laughed at it and said

You don't expect me to actually wear that do you?

and even her mother bitch that she is though I
once thought I loved her god knows why said Lisa,
that's no way to act

but I just shrugged and said You can throw it out

the fucking window for all I care Here I'll do it for you
and they were living in Weehawken then in this
high-rise on Boulevard East with a great view of
Manhattan and I took the bracelet and threw it off the
balcony closing the sliding glass doors behind me
pulling the patch of curtain out of the door jamb where
it was pulled by the wind and I know they're looking at
me stunned I guess they hadn't said anything yet

so I said

So much for that

and Ginger goes

That was really mature, Vince. What are you
going to do for an encore? Toss the two of us out there
too?

and Lisa says

Why do you always have to ruin my birthday?

Why don't you just leave

so I did

That's just a little background a little hors
d'oeuvre of sorts to do with Lisa my creation my
Frankendaughter I've created a monster she was a bad
seed she was conceived and raised for all the wrong
reasons vanity pride cruelty and I'm as much to blame
as anyone she was fifty percent me she was fifty percent
me

and being a royal bitch too the day of the blood
drive but we made it to the Bloodmobile and while
we're in line she's saying

You know fathers who love their daughters take
them skiing and shopping and buy them expensive
clothes on their days off

and she keeps on saying shit like that and
complains about the needle how weak she's feeling
afterwards and I'm trying to ignore her trying to tune
her out when somehow I see data that both Lisa and I

are type A positive, same blood type as Michelle and that sets the wheels in motion because then I'm back on the road driving home and it's raining, the road wet and slick and in the background of the wiper noise I can hear Lisa's voice whining on complaining that's all she did would do and I couldn't tell her to just shut the fuck up because that would only make things worse but there she is right beside me whining and I start thinking Why does she deserve to live and Michelle deserve to die?

I know this is not a question I should have been asking there's no rhyme or reason and that old hokum that the Lord works in mysterious ways might be fine for some Bible chump but not for me so I start thinking about this and I start thinking about that how I had always told Michelle that I would kill or die for her and this is when I faced my test I didn't see it coming it happened so fast but yes to give you an example sometimes you're faced with a test that you don't plan or foresee suddenly they drop it in your lap

Vince pauses to light a cigarette but David is wide awake now waiting to hear the rest

So what was the test, then? Don't keep me hanging

The thing about Michelle was, she was like no other woman I had ever known. I vaguely remember the good times with Ginger, even the early years when Lisa was a baby and we were happy, I guess, kind of

but with Michelle it was different. It's impossible to describe I guess but sometimes I'd look at her and she'd be like fucking electric, like a charge that was going through me, and at times I'd kiss her and her mouth her breasts her cunt her ass everything would be

almost too much for me, like I couldn't get close enough to her, like I would wake up in the morning wanting to lick her and taste her, I'd put my fingers in her when we were at movie theaters, I'd get hard just thinking about when she'd get off work and come home to me and we'd get in bed immediately but it wasn't just sex of course it was the sound of her voice the way she'd make me feel

how she read in the bathtub every night, how she would take these long hot baths in the water steaming turning her lovely lily white skin a bright pink from the heat and she'd lie in the tub one arm propped on the side with the bathroom door open reading and sweating her beautiful blonde hair slicked away from her face and our favorite cat Ernie would hop on the side of the tub and rub his face against hers, lick her hands, because there was something that drove animals to her and made them want to lick and nuzzle her

after she got out of the tub the pages of the books would always be rippled with dampness and the edge of the tub would be marked with the cloverleaves of Ernie's paw prints

and later, I would pick up my novels and magazines and all the pages would be wrinkled and crinkled from her wet fingers, from the beads of her sweat fallen from her face

lying in bed at night with her in my arms with Michelle in my arms I felt engulfed by her beauty swallowed by it the way I wanted to swallow her and I would swell with this feeling and it would scare me, really it would, I'd be lying there frightened because my life had been so fucked up to that point that I knew or at least I suspected this was too good to be true, this could never last, so when I found out about Michelle's heart condition her heart problem I wasn't completely

surprised really, I knew this too would be taken from me, this was too good to be true and the world out of jealousy at least would step in to stop it to put an end to it to us to everything how does Poe put it the angels not half so happy in heaven went envying her and me?

So I was driving along this rainy wet road coming home from the Bloodmobile riding along the blood drive in a way with Lisa my bitchy daughter thinking about the words I'd said so many times to Michelle, how I would gladly die for her, or kill for her, and thinking about her heart problem knowing that there were two perfectly good hearts in this car thinking how if I could I would rip my heart out and give it to her and

I realized that if I simply sped up put a fraction more pressure on the gas pedal that the car would be forced to swerve veer wildly out of control and all I had to do was hurry, that was all, and I'd been an impatient man all my life and quickly I couldn't think of a reason not to, not to do it

and Lisa said

Hey slow down Where's the fire?

and she didn't even have time to say another word before I slammed on the brakes we spun crazy out of control and

I learned later

we hit a tree

His voice stopped and for a brief moment, it seemed as if the enormous city itself were holding its breath, David could still see the Chrysler building in the distance uptown, was chilled and shivering slightly inside his leather jacket, until an ambulance there's always a tragedy happening somewhere a rape every three seconds a murder every five heartbreak beyond

numbers and seconds as David was thinking this is no joke this is real

We hit a tree, said Vince. And Lisa flew through the windshield sixty feet through the air landed face down in a field of wet wildflowers. She never wore safety belts she refused to do it because she said they wrinkled her clothes and she didn't like that

I broke my collarbone my right ankle both wrists cuts all over my face lost a lot of blood which was dangerous from already giving it that day but still after three weeks in the hospital I walked out on my own two feet while Lisa

Lisa lived but her spine was severed. Never walk again, that kind of thing. She gets around pretty well on wheels now, though. And you wouldn't believe the way she's changed. She's a sweetheart now, would you believe it?

Michelle's heart gave out when she heard about the wreck. I never saw her again, alive at least

it felt pretty weird I felt pretty weird about the whole thing as you can imagine but after a year or so I told myself

Well at least now Lisa's heart is in the right place

For a moment a collection of hearbeats Pulse and Other Stories David doesn't have a clue he stands there looking out at the sooty eyelashes of the city sleeping Manhattan grimy grimy night stumped he is like an aborigine considering a periodic chart of elements though he knows he should say something anything at least you didn't kill her maybe but he doesn't say a word

& after that dead air Vince says

So when I'm telling you sometimes you face a test and you can't always see them coming I'm not kidding you see I faced one you wanted an example so there it is

there's your example Michelle died Lisa's a cripple but
altogether a better person for it what do you think? Pass
or Fail? Don't worry don't answer that I live with it
every day every night every fucking minute you
understand what I'm saying?

Vince lit a cigar, a Romeo y Julietta, and puffed it,
sending blue clouds of smoke into the gray light of the
dawn over New York sounds o nice you have to say it
twice he said and did so New York New York so what
are you thinking over there Davey boy What's going on
in that knotty mind of yours?

David didn't answer so Vince said

So. What. Are. You. Thinking. Question Mark.

Vince drew one a question mark that is in the sky
with his finger swerve and curl of hand and elaborate
dot not an eye but point at bottom

Nothing, said David. My mind is a blank

Vince nodded and puffed his cigar, knocking the
ashes off, edging the gray fluff onto the building's walls
I'm going to keep an eye on you, capiche?

Don't worry, said David. My lips are sealed

And in turn I will not inform the office of your
impending fatherhood. Deal?

Deal

IF YOU WERE IN MY SHOES

David Hepburn was not a man without
convictions. He believed the guilty will be punished,
the weak but worthy will be rewarded; there is
ultimately justice. He had cheated on his wife, had
copulated with other married women on their living
room sofas where hours later their children would sit
and eat microwaved popcorn, and believed he had been

punished for this betrayal as he had lost the gentle and gorgeous woman he loved and now she was in another man's arms, breathing to the beat of another man's pulse. He had no children but had fostered the issue of three abortions number four on the way and had come to see these children as gaps in his life ghosts in the machine I am an old man a dull head among windy spaces. Now forty-three years old he had come to believe his life was a porridge of events which he failed to understand at the moment and only in retrospect had realized his many, many mistakes, missteps, misspeaks. After losing his lovely wife Karen for whom his love still flashed he had promised to do better, to live his life better, to be a better person, so when Vince told him of the wreck, of paralyzing his daughter, he was thrown into a crisis. To rat or not to rat. The man had mangled his daughter. He'd schemed to place her beating heart in the chest of her stepmother. This a crime. A sin.

And then there was Judy Hashamoto. Twenty-three year old Judy Hashamoto his administrative assistant who could be his daughter could be carrying his daughter who when he asked one night You hungry? You want something to eat?

she said

That would be nice

and one thing led to another she was tiny child-size like a miniature human had jet black hair tiny hands and ears so meek she was he wanted to wrap her in his arms protect her from the world the taxi drivers the squeegee men the zombies lurking in the lobby full lips and dark eyes she spoke so softly at dinner he couldn't hear half of what she said and hours later he kissed her throat

I should be going home she said

Yes you should. But you aren't

defrocked her skin was like a dream of skin so smooth and ultrawhite like rice paper a dark mole on her the soft underside of her left breast like a small and misplaced button it was she shivered during as he moved inside her her sex like a small tightly clenched hand around him and when he eased to sleep that night it was not without a sense of nostalgia luck and confused remorse rootless and as he faded to black she whispered

This is going to change everything isn't it?

Maybe I don't know Maybe for the better Yes that's it Only for the better I hope

Me too

But by the third sleep over he was thinking Maybe this wasn't such a good idea after all. At work as predicted she was changing and already asked one night while they were having dinner again sushi this time

Where are we going? You and I?

I don't know he said

which wasn't good enough he could tell

so when he flew to Milwaukee for a presentation he refused to return her calls and tried to ignore the subject act as if they had never happened until she said the morning he returned

Can we talk?

Of course we can talk. We talk every day don't we?

She nodded and said I'm going to have a baby

Oh he said and blinked blinking his mind a blank Your baby

You said you couldn't get pregnant

That's what I thought. That's what they told me.

There was supposed to be something wrong with my ovaries

I guess they were wrong
I guess so. The doctors are calling it a miracle
A miracle. Do you want an abortion?
Would you kill a miracle?
Now come on
I don't want one. Never
Never say never
Never
There you go. Saying it again
Never. Never never never

He told her he'd have to think about it think it
over how he'd panic with the situation

I'll get back to you he said

That was the day before, a Tuesday. Then Vince
told him the Lisa slash Michelle story and he wasn't
going in to work that day and he woke at noon with a
headache in his cramped one room place on Stuyvesent
thinking Vince-like Maybe she'll get hit by a bus but no
he didn't want that it's just that it would make things
easier hello child support hello deadbeat dad hello
hollow man

now he has to do the right thing
but what is the right thing?

so he calls in sick and calls in sick his penis burns
slightly when he urinates and he wonders if it's some
kind of infection thing or just guilt the pangs of and
Friday Judy Hashamoto calls while he's asleep in the
middle of the afternoon on the sofa and she says

Were you asleep? I'm sorry

No he says irritated I'm not asleep it's two in the
afternoon Why would I be asleep?

You're sick right?

I think it's a flu or something he says wondering
if it's the Asian flu but knowing that wouldn't be the

right thing to say at this moment

Why didn't you return any of my calls? I left some messages for you

The machine must be on the fritz he lied I haven't got any messages at all in the last few days why don't you come over tomorrow and we can talk I'll be better by then

and Saturday morning Judy Hashamoto arrives at his apartment with a book of names saying What do you think of this? Larissa. Monique. Silver. Candy

I think we should talk about this

Judy smiled. We always talk

Okay, he said. Two can play. I don't want to be a father

But you are. Or will be

This isn't fair

If it's a boy, what about Leo? Jason? Craig?

We're not finished talking

You don't know what you want, said Judy. That's it in a nutshell

and David wondered if she was right actually women were always good at figuring him out knowing him better than he knew himself as Karen said "You'll never be true to anyone" and he hoped she was wrong but he feared it was right on the money money best set aside for baby's bills and diapers nannies Nintendo games expensive sneakers where does it end it never does with three abortions before he'd dodged a bullet and there was Vince of course ramming his car into a tree to put his daughter's heart in his love's chest remembering that public service announcement on TV years ago It's 10 o'clock—DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR CHILDREN ARE? or aren't as the case may be and sometimes it's hard to know the right thing to do but some skeletons are best left in the closet and so he said

But Judy, the thing is, I don't love you
He waited for an answer, for her to speak, as she
paged through her book of names.

Love is nice, she said. But I can live without it. I
have for most of my life

So David tried to formulate a snappy comeback
but all that he could think was if it's a boy maybe Rock
or Stone would be good

a name with heart

a word without ambiguity

unlike the world this world no a name for another
world where hearts are always in the right place and if
you think long and hard enough you will realize the
right thing to do when it walks up and bites you